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While travelling in the Grand Traverse region of Northern Michigan last May, I observed, growing in the beech and maple woods, plants of *Trillium erythrocarpum*, which were fair representatives of metamorphosed plants. The petioles much elongated (2'-4'); leaves very large and distorted; sepals leaf-like, raised on petioles an inch or more long. The petals likewise leaf-like, colored green, with a few white lines. Even the stamens and pistils were colored green, and all vestige of the flowers had disappeared. I was so situated as to be unable to preserve any of the specimens I found. I also found *Uvularia perfoliata* Linn., bearing two, three, and even four flowers upon a single plant, which I believe to be as uncommon.—R. H. FISHER, *Mt. Etna, Ind.*

ZOÖLOGY.

THE MCNIEL EXPEDITION.—In the November NATURALIST a short notice was given of Mr. McNiel's expedition to Central America. After about five months work in the field, and the expenditure of about all his funds, Mr. McNiel availed himself of the great liberality of the Panama Railroad Company, and Pacific Mail Steamship Company, to return home with his collections, free of cost, in order to refit and consult in regard to more extended operations, which the knowledge he had derived during his trip seemed to make most desirable. The plan is now for him to return to Nicaragua, accompanied with an assistant and competent collector and taxidermist, in the person of Mr. Walker, a student of the Peabody Academy of Science, provided about \$3000 can be secured for the purpose.

The many acts of kindness received by Mr. McNiel from the officers of the Panama Railroad and Pacific Mail Steamship Companies, and their generosity, expressed in the substantial form of free passes and free transportation of materials, and the hospitality and kindly assistance received and proffered from Don J. J. and Capt. F. B. DeShon, Mr. Nelson, Mr. Sternburgh, Col. Haratzthy, Capt. Douglass, and others; and the interest in his labors and aid extended by the official authorities, secures a decided success to the continuation of the expedition; and with the assistance of Mr. Walker, who will more especially devote himself to the collecting of birds and mammals, large and valuable results are looked for with a certainty of fulfilment. It is proposed to return Mr. McNiel back to his field of work in a few weeks, so as to take full advantage of the dry season, which is far more conducive to collecting than the rainy one in which most of his collections thus far have been made. On his return, special attention will be given to archæological and ethnological matters, as well as zoölogical, and interesting results are looked for in these researches.

Among the specimens brought home by Mr. McNiel, consisting of corals, shells (marine, fresh water, and land), insects (including a large number of butterflies, beetles, and tarantulas), fishes, reptiles (including

a large living rattlesnake), and a few mammals, were two large stone pans and a "masher," discovered on the island of Corinto, on the Pacific coast of Nicaragua, having been washed out of the sand by a late heavy rain. These "pans" are very interesting, in showing that the same kind of utensils and implements of stone were in use by a forgotten race, as those now in common use by the natives of the interior of Nicaragua; for though there is no doubt of the great antiquity of the implements found on the island, yet stone "pans" of the same shape were seen by Mr. McNiel in use by the natives, for the purpose of preparing a coarse food by mashing hulled corn on the pan by means of a nearly cylindrical stone, held in both hands and used as a "masher." This fact is doubly interesting to us, as there are in the Museum of the Academy stones of similar shape, found in various parts of New England, that were undoubtedly used for an identical or very similar purpose by the aborigines of our own land.

To Col. A. Haratzthy, of Corinto, the Ethnological collection of the Academy is indebted for a most unique and ancient pair of enormous stirrups made of wood, elaborately carved, and bound with iron; and to the Messrs. De Shon, for an ancient rapier, bearing the maker's stamp of "Lisbon, 1621."

Capt. A. T. Douglass also sent an addition to our live stock, by Mr. McNiel, in the form of a most mischievous and interesting little animal, about the size of a cat, combining the mischievousness of a monkey with habits between a bear and raccoon, who, since his instalment at the Academy, has evinced a decided affection for the cat and a most manifest desire to ascertain the nature of the contents of every box and bottle in the room, and has proved to us that he is a good observer of objects of nature, if not a very discriminating naturalist. The Nicaraguan name of this interesting little fellow is "Pisota." In South America, two or three closely allied species of the genus are generally known under the name of "Coati."

As stated in the November *NATURALIST*, the continuance of the expedition depends on the disposal of duplicate specimens to various parties, and it is hoped that individuals and institutions wishing to have collections in the various departments, will at once send their subscriptions to the expedition fund, and state the character of the specimens they wish in return. A large number of specimens are now nearly ready to be distributed to subscribers, and there are plenty of most of the species to furnish good suites to all who apply soon. Subscriptions will be received in sums of \$100 and upwards, but the larger the subscription the more satisfactory will it be to both parties, as the division of the specimens can then be carried on with less trouble and expense than if made up into small lots, and the subscriber will receive a proportionally greater number of specimens, unless only some special class of specimens is required by the subscriber.

For further information regarding the expedition, address F. W. PUTNAM, *Director P. A. S.*

AMBERGRIS.—I find in the American Cyclopaedia the following account: "It is a morbid secretion of the liver of the Spermaceti Whale, found floating on the sea, sometimes on shore; it is found in the intestines of diseased whales." In 1842, the bark Spartan, from this port, killed a sperm whale that was exceedingly lean; on cutting into the whale, the lower portion of the intestine was cut off, and some small balls floated out, but only a very small portion of it was saved. In 1862, the schooner Estella, of this port, killed a lean sperm whale, from which they took sixty-six pounds of ambergris, which, on the arrival of the vessel, sold for \$64 per pound. On another voyage, in the following year, the same schooner captured a whale, from which they took twenty-three pounds nine ounces, which sold for \$70 per pound. Last spring a very lean whale was killed by the schooner Watchman in the West Indian seas, from which was taken thirty-eight pounds fifteen ounces of ambergris, which sold for \$90 per pound, amounting to \$3,504.37. These cases are all that I have found where whalers have been fortunate enough to find ambergris in whales. There is no doubt that they sometimes let carcasses go that contain more value in the intestines than the whole blubber is worth. This substance, accumulating in the intestines, causes a stoppage so that nothing can pass from them; in this condition they cannot live long. I have seen sperm whales on the water that had been dead so long that the blubber was spoiled. If such die from a secretion of ambergris they would contain a large amount of that valuable substance, and it would pay well for the trouble of taking in all whales met with on the water, if the cause of their death is unknown.

The food of the sperm whale is mostly the large squid; it is the opinion of some of our whalers that the bills (a specimen of which I presented to the Essex Institute not long since) are not digested in the stomach of whales, but pass down the intestines until they come near the vent, where they accumulate and finally cause a stoppage. This they infer from the fact that they find these bills (as they call them) with the ambergris.—N. E. ATWOOD, *Provincetown, Mass.*

MOULTING OF THE SHRIMP (*Mysis*).—I enclose a few Shrimp "moult," whereof the most enormous quantity drifted ashore on Thursday, August 13, 1868. They were left by the tide in windrows, at the mouth of the river, and along the beaches for miles. I picked up a handful, and send the enclosed as of possible interest. They seemed all nearly of a size, and probably, therefore, of a uniform age. I was not aware before that the reticulated cornea of the eye was shed with the skeleton, and possibly others share my ignorance.—W. C. JOHNSON, *Newburyport, Mass.*

NEST OF THE BELTED KINGFISHER.—I notice from articles in the September and June numbers relating to the Belted Kingfisher, that Mr. Endicott and Mr. Wood disagree. I agree with the latter gentleman in saying that I have always found the holes from four to six feet in depth, and *never to the depth of eight feet*, as Mr. Endicott says, and with the exception of two cases, both of which occurred in clay banks, straight in

the direction in which they start. Mr. Endicott asks if any one have ever known them to turn to the left? In answer to his enquiry, I would like to have it distinctly understood, that in both the cases mentioned above, *the holes turned to the left*. I have sometimes found a nest of grass and sticks, but not usually. Mr. Wood says the eggs are about seven in number. I have found as many as eleven eggs in a nest, but never more than that.—C. E. WILLIAMS, *Utica, N. Y.*

GEOLOGY.

THE IOWA DRIFT.—Since my announcement, at the late meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, at Chicago, of having traced up to their original ledges in North-western Iowa, and the adjacent parts of Dakota and Minnesota, the red quartzite boulders of the drift of Western Iowa, I have had the additional pleasure of following up, to its original home, much of the granite also, which is profusely scattered in the Iowa drift.

These observations of granite *in situ*, were confined to the immediate vicinity of the Minnesota river, and indeed to the bottom of its valley alone, but extending a distance of about thirty miles, being from a point a few miles below Fort Ridgley, to the mouth of the Red-wood river. These rocks, although evidently belonging to one continuous mass, are quite variable in texture and proportions of composition, even within a short distance. The prevailing color is reddish, from the great preponderance of feldspar of that color. Hornblende is always present, and sometimes preponderating to such an extent that limited portions have the characteristics of hornblende slate. Mica is not always discernible, but can usually be detected. The quartz is mostly in small granular crystals, and is evidently the origin of a portion of the drift sands of that region. Indistinct lines of stratification can often be seen in these rocks, and they not unfrequently present the characters of gneiss. The rocks are found in place only in the river valley, for the reason that the whole region is covered deeply with drift, with a prairie surface, having a very distinct general level, down from which the river has eroded its valley during the unnumbered post-glacial centuries, down to these underlying rocks. The valley now presents the appearance of a huge, well-defined, slightly tortuous ditch, about a mile wide, and something more than one hundred feet deep. Thus, as one travels over the prairie surface of the region, he sees nothing of these rocks *in situ*, but in the bottom of the valley he finds frequent large exposures of granitic rocks as characteristic as those of New England. As might be inferred from the great preponderance of feldspar and hornblende, these rocks readily disintegrate, much more so in fact than common limestone, and at the mouth of the Red-wood there are large exposures of them, reaching a hundred feet in thickness, yet in place and undisturbed, but so thoroughly decomposed, that one can crush it in his hand to the condition of ordinary soil, like that described by Professor Agassiz, as composing the Organ mountains,